

Workplace psychology – communicating information and using influence effectively

This article on the topic of workplace psychology takes a look at how to communicate information more effectively and influence the behaviours of others at work.

Training plays an extremely important role in helping to raise health and safety standards. But simply presenting information to employees may not be enough to effect the change you want. Instead, you need to carefully consider how information is communicated – and, most importantly, how to positively influence your employees.

Workplace psychology – communication preferences

One of the keys to effective workplace communication is to understand what motivates your employees. What makes them tick? What do they like and dislike? What has worked – and hasn't worked – in the past?

Once you know how to relate to individuals, it becomes much easier to present information in a way that appeals to them. Some will be happy to read documentation, whereas others will take safety videos on board. And some will need on-the-job guidance.

Ultimately, it is your ability to tailor the way in which information is shared that will determine whether training is effective or not. It's not about you; your colleagues' preferences are the key factor in an effective conversation.

Use gentle persuasion

The communication preferences of your colleagues are not just important for training. Every discussion you have at work needs to take these factors into account to help you build rapport.

By building relationships, you will find it much easier to persuade colleagues to change the way they work. Gentle persuasion is much more effective than issuing ultimatums.

Add credibility, lead by example

'Practise what you preach' is more than an old saying – it's something you should be striving to achieve at work. Your employees watch you closely, checking to see if you hold yourself to the same standards you expect of them.

If you consistently adhere to safe working practices, your employees will notice. Not only will this raise your credibility, but it will also increase your powers of persuasion. Workers are much more likely to adopt desired behaviours.

Show respect

Managers face an additional challenge: do they want to be popular or do they want to earn the respect of their colleagues? Popularity is relatively easy to achieve, but it could also be an Achilles heel. You might tell the funniest jokes and always get people's attention while doing so, but do people also listen to the important safety information you share with them?

Respect is the twin of credibility. If people find you credible, they are much more likely to respect you. At which point they are easier to influence.

Line managers must invest time and effort into making themselves credible, and therefore respectable. And if the choice is between popularity and respectability, always go for the latter.

Listen carefully to what others say

Effective communication is a two-way process – even when you are trying to share information. You must listen to your colleagues before, during and after any discussion.

As well as better understanding the people you work with by listening carefully to them, you might also find that they may provide

additional insights that affect your plans. Always be open to suggestions – you don't have all the answers, so your colleagues can play their part in improving site safety too.

Finally, allow time and patience

Sharing information effectively and influencing people is not something that 'just happens'. You will need to invest time and effort cultivating trust and respect with colleagues. The investment will pay off, however, as your teams begin to work together more efficiently (and accident rates decline).

For more help on applying workplace psychology to improve standards of health and safety on your sites, please get in touch.

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DAVID CANT

Veritas Consulting

www.veritas-consulting.co.uk

